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**The construction of Heavy Metal identity through heritage
narratives: A case study of extreme metal bands in the North
of England**

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Abstract

Extreme and black metal is a music genre infused with ideologies of elitism, nationalism and exaggerated masculinity. In this paper, we explore the ways in which four bands from the north of England – Winterfylleth, Wodensthroner, Old Corpse Road and Oakenshield – construct mythologies, heritage narratives and identity through their own reflections on their music, metal and myths. These extreme metal bands in the North of England work inside the symbolic boundaries of their scene and exist within the imagined communities of their region. That is, the bands construct mythologies based around masculinity and around elitism, but also about “northernness.”

Introduction

Popular music and culture are sites of identity construction, where identity defines belonging to and exclusion from an imagined community delineated by symbolic boundaries. Extreme heavy metal, as a genre of popular music, and a part of popular culture, is a site where such identity formation, myth-making and boundary maintenance can be seen (Kahn-Harris). In this paper, we explore how extreme metal¹ bands originating from the North of England draw upon narratives of

heritage and historical myths to construct exclusive, masculinating metal identities (Lucas; Lucas, Deeks and Spracklen). We will use qualitative case-study research (interview data combined with an analysis of histories, images and songs) of four extreme metal bands - Winterfylleth, Wodensthron, Old Corpse Road and Oakenshield - based in the North of England (see also Lucas, Deeks and Spracklen). This data will allow us to argue that these Northern English extreme "metallars" express a desire to tell (or construct) histories that have been forgotten in a globalizing world - heritage narratives associated with the North. However, their use of heritage and myth is still bounded by the invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger), myth-making and symbolic boundaries of the wider extreme metal scene: the mythology of Germanic warriors; and the mythology of regional and national pride.

Debates in leisure studies over the meaning of leisure, couched in terms of freedom and constraint, have hinged on the postmodern turn (Bramham; Rojek; Spracklen, "The Meaning"). At the same time, researchers of popular music have theorized the development of neo-tribes as the effect of postmodernity on practices of consumption and identity formation (Hodkinson). Crucial to belonging is boundary work - which myths and symbols are used to maintain the intersecting imaginary communities of northern European (northern English) black metal. What we are interested in here is the way in which

"heritage" in extreme metal music is used to construct exclusive, white masculine identities - whiteness associated with individualism, elitism and Englishness juxtaposed with a more broader "Vikingness". We are interested in the "beating of the boundaries" (Cohen) - who is allowed to define belonging within the scene, how musicians attempt to create symbolic boundaries against the liquidity of late modern identity formation (Bauman).

We begin the paper with a literature review and a discussion of method. We will then critically analyze the histories, imagery and songs of the four bands, before discussing the bands' understanding of heritage and myths revealed to us through interviews with the songwriters in each band. Finally, we will return to the theoretical framework of the introduction and literature review to assess the way in which community, identity, heritage and extreme metal collide in the myth-making associated with these bands.

Literature Review

To examine how imaginings of "heritage" and narratives of the *past* inform the discursive construction of self and identification with a collective in the *present*, one must consider the politics of heritage functioning within wider society. Furthermore, one is required to question how historical myth acts as a resource that creates meaning for the individual, becomes emblematic of the social, and asserts

the symbolic boundaries that mediate inclusion and exclusion within communities such as the northern English extreme metal scene.

This exploration works from the premise outlined in Hobsbawm and Ranger's *The Invention of Tradition*, which asserts that many of the traditions generally considered as being rooted in history are in fact contemporary constructs. In outlining the role and function of history in a discussion of invented traditions, Hobsbawm asserts that "all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 12). Heritage narratives and the myths of history present the potential for the authentication of a collective and in doing so legitimize the symbolic boundaries of belonging through exclusionary practices.

Cohen emphasizes the symbolic construction of community and the experience of that collective by the members, stating that "it inheres... in 'the thinking' about it," stressing that the constituent social relations need to be viewed as "repositories of meaning" rather than a "set of mechanical linkages" (Cohen 98). He describes how, with community existing in the minds of its members, its perceived distinctiveness and the reality of its boundaries similarly lie in the mind and the meanings that people attach to them (Cohen 98), an idea akin to Benedict Anderson's conceptualization of "imagined communities." A significant

element of the symbolic expression of community is constituted with selective reference to the past, but Cohen is explicit that this is not a regressive or nostalgic avoidance of the contemporary in the construction of a collective. The past is described as a resource by Cohen, and he suggests that "[t]he manner in which the past is invoked is strongly indicative of the kinds of circumstance which makes such a 'past-reference' salient" (Cohen 99). Myth, suggests Cohen, provides legitimacy for contemporary action by "extending to it the sanctity which enshrouds tradition and lore," whilst the idea of "mythological distance" is presented as a way of lending "enchantment to an otherwise murky contemporary view" (Cohen 99).

The idea of heritage as a resource is taken up by Brian Graham within frameworks theorizing cultural capital, the knowledge economy and place. Graham stresses the temporal and cultural plurality of heritage interpretations, representations and meanings (Graham 104). From this perspective one can appreciate how heritage, as economic and cultural entities; tangible and intangible, exists as a contested concept. In explaining this contestation through the notion of dissonance as intrinsically present in heritage, Graham rejects the assumption of the universal absolutism of heritage and suggests that "the creation of any heritage actively or potentially disinherits or excludes those who do not subscribe to, or are not embraced within, the terms of

meaning attending that heritage" (Graham 105). In discussing the legitimization provided by the use of the past, Graham suggests that this trait of heritage is particularly associated with various types of collective identification, which are used to "construct narratives of inclusion and exclusion that define communities and the ways in which they are rendered specific and differentiated" (Graham 108).

Many theorists in the field of heritage studies discuss the link between heritage and place, another significant attribute in the construction and negotiation of collective identifications. Laura Jane Smith's work discusses "place" by drawing attention to Escobar's delineation of place as a "category of thought" and a "constructed reality". Through this, Smith suggests that heritage not only provides a "physical anchor or geographical sense of belonging," and is not only used to construct a sense of "abstract identity," but it helps in positioning oneself as individuals, within a nation or community, as well as locating oneself in the cultural, social and physical world (Smith, "Uses" 75). O'Keefe notes a significant line of thought within landscape culturalism, which is that communities invest in landscapes, and that identities are "metaphorized" and located within them, thus, suggests O'Keefe, "all landscapes are social-ecological, and all landscapes qualify as somebody's heritage" (O'Keefe 9). However, one is brought back to the concept of dissonance, as Smith suggests that the multi-vocality of place

and experiences of heritage "inevitably" create contestation in the meaning and value ascribed to heritage places, and hence also impact upon "the legitimization - or not - of a sense of place" (Smith, "Uses" 80-81). An examination of the multimodal representations of place within the heritage narratives of northern English extreme metal bands can help to explain how heritage places not only create collectivity through shared memories, identities and experiences, but give physical reality to these expressions (Smith, "Uses" 77).

There has been a movement in heritage scholarship towards a focus on theorizing the intangible aspects of heritage and the processes of meaning making. Smith states that

the real sense of heritage, the real moment of heritage when our emotions and sense of self are truly engaged, is not so much in the possession of [an object], but in the act of passing on and receiving memories and knowledge. It also occurs in the way that we then reshape and recreate those memories and knowledge to help us make sense of and understand not only who we "are", but also who we want to be (Smith, "Uses" 2).

Samuel points to the Middle English use of the term heritage, which was concerned with ideas of hereditary rights (Samuel 231), but suggests that in contemporary usage heritage offers a sense of place rather than heredity, as well as being seen as an escape from class, which, according to Samuel,

explains for its popularity. He presents this escapism as a "romance of otherness," which allows "the most humdrum and ordinary" a second identity (Samuel 247).

Another issue that is raised by a small number of scholars (Littler; Smith), and one that is largely overlooked in discussions of heritage, is that of gender. Berger has outlined how the language of advertising works to create images of masculine power and feminine desirability, while Easthope describes how the "masculine myth" present in popular culture naturalizes, normalizes and universalizes the dominant masculinity. As popular culture, sport and the culture around sport and leisure reveal similar discourses - heavy metal, like sport, is one site of the social construction of hegemonic masculinity. By masculinity it is taken to mean the processes and ideas that go towards the construction of male identity. However, the concept of masculinity is sometimes overused without any clear definition of what it is. It becomes self-evident if we talk about the social construction of masculinity that there can be a number of masculinities: dominant heterosexual, homosexual, marginalized and so on (Connell). That said, there is a hegemonic masculine identity that has been imposed so thoroughly on western culture that most observers take it as a norm: that of the dominant heterosexual male identified by Gilmore or Butler, the impregnator-protector-provider, or the warrior Viking of so much heavy metal iconography. Gilmore argues that this

cultural role of man, historically, has contributed to the aggressive, dominating acts of bravado that identify the heteronormative male in contemporary society (Butler). This idea of a masculine archetype is challenged by work done in both psychology and sociology on the fragility of male identity (Connell; Messner). That man was created and instinctively became the "Ubiquitous Male" is contested by Goldberg, who explored the socialization of boys into tough manhood, and the emotional trouble and identity crisis this engendered. Hearn suggests that the concept of masculinity is weak, and that instead we should look at how maleness is theorized, and what types of masculinity are produced. The struggle of males to define their own identity has also been observed by Horrocks in *Masculinity in Crisis*, who sees a crisis in man over what it is to be one, what types of masculinity are acceptable. Horrocks' *Male Myths* also explores the psychology of masculinity, taking as his starting point the importance of the individual in defining his own identity from 'male myths and icons'. Critical feminists have pointed to a more complex relationship between gender, power, patriarchy and leisure that calls for changes in the social structure (Scruton and Watson). Connell introduces the idea of the gender order in *Gender and Power* and it is developed in *Masculinities*. Connell describes gender as a process rather than a thing. Thus we are asked to study "a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity

and masculinity" (Connell, "Gender" 98-99). This gender order can be expressed through forms of cultural activity, which either maintain the gender order, or are sites of resistance to the gender order: black metal clearly maintains the gender order, but some resistance to it is also seen in the way some fans supported Gaahl of Gorgoroth, who came out as a homosexual to a torrent of abuse on on-line forums (Spracklen, "Gorgoroth's Gaahl").

Methodology

In this research project, we have used qualitative case-study research based on structured interviews with band members, and textual analyses of the lyrics, imagery, music, symbols and artifacts of four extreme metal bands - Winterfylleth, Wodensthron, Old Corpse Road and Oakenshield. The research draws on some of the unpublished content of semi-structured interviews undertaken with the same four bands for the paper published by Lucas, Deeks and Spracklen. The bands were identified and approached through our knowledge of the scene and contacts we had with each of the four bands.

Wodensthron supplied a lengthy document electronically with full answers from each member of the band, written under their pseudonyms. We used this document for our previously published paper and as a basis for this new research. For this paper, we returned to the main songwriter for each of each of the other three bands and asked them specific questions about their

understanding of history, their use of mythology and heritage narratives in their songs, their thoughts about the heritage of heavy (extreme) metal, and the way in which these themes were expressed in (or influenced) their music. These questions emerged out of our previous research and the literature review; they form the framework for the discussion and analysis that follows the account of the four bands below. We have used the pseudonyms used by the musicians where they use such names: Oakenshield for the man behind Oakenshield; The Dreamer for Old Corpse Road's drummer; and for Wodensthroner, we have used the pseudonyms they supplied in the original response document.

The Bands

Winterfylleth

Winterfylleth were founded in 2007 by two musicians who had played together and apart in various extreme metal bands in the north of England. The band name comes from the Old English name for October, which is only recorded in the writing of Bede, but which is reprised by JRR Tolkien in the invented calendar of the hobbits of the Shire. For their first album *The Ghost of Heritage* (2008), Winterfylleth had three members. This album used an image of the Peak District² for the album cover, and included songs that used Old English poems and other sources to tell stories about Saxons fighting Danes. Song titles included some that resonate with a number of

readings: "Forging the Iron of England," which tells of the Saxons preparing for battle; and "Defending the Realm." The first album came out on the independent label Profound Lore, and it received strong reviews in the extreme metal press. Around the time of the album's release a relatively new member of the band posted far-right comments on an internet forum, which created a strong controversy (and resulting publicity) for the band - though the band were quick to distance themselves from this member, who left the band soon after the comments were posted (Lucas). The band signed to Candlelight Records, a well-known independent metal label, and found two new members for their second album, *The Mercian Sphere* (2010). The songs on the album play with themes of history, heritage belonging and Englishness. The song "A Valley Thick with Oaks," for example, has the following lyrics at the beginning and end, which link the writer's sense of place and heritage to the hills of the north of England, but which also allow the listener or reader to read them in more conservative ways:

With the breath of our ancestors

A knot of roots

Hold steadfast the earth

Bonds that link a nation,

Foregoing generations

Eternal, unswayed

...

A voice in the wind
Telling secrets of the fallen
Lessons without words
A proud spirit remains
In the heart of every Englishman
(Lyrics by Lucas, S. and Naughton, C.)

In interviews in the extreme metal magazines (Zero Tolerance and Terrorizer) promoting the second album, the band have argued for pride in English history and English identity and have despaired of a modern Britain where such history (heritage, belonging) has been lost.

Wodensthron

Wodensthron are a black metal band from the North-East of England, founded in 2005. The name of the band evokes the old Saxon pagan high god Woden, from whom we get Wednesday and who is also known as Odin and Wotan. The founding members of Wodensthron played in other extreme metal bands and continue to do so: for Wodensthron, the musicians adopt the anonymity of Old English pseudonyms. One of the members of Wodensthron is an ex-member of Winterfylleth (not the musician who posted the far-right comments) and appeared on the band's first album. Wodensthron released a couple of split releases with other extreme metal bands and their use of Anglo-Saxon lyrics and Germanic imagery (knots resonant of swastikas) and themes led to some accusations of their being associated with

National Socialist Black Metal (for NSBM see Spracklen, "A Blaze"). Their first album, *Loss* (2009) was released by small American metal label Bindrune Recordings, but with positive reviews in the metal press and on-line the band quickly signed to Candlelight Records (in the wake of Winterfylleth's signing) and the album was re-released. Song titles on the album, like those of Winterfylleth, are open to multiple readings: "Upon These Stones" and "Those that Crush the Roots of Blood" are both fantasies of Saxon fighters swinging swords and words to stir up patriotism and racial pride. Around the release of *Loss* they were accused by elements of the anarchist-punk AntiFa movement of being a part of NSBM, and as a result they were forced to cancel their appearance at a Manchester gig. However, the band has denied that they are a "political" band on their MySpace and in interviews.

Old Corpse Road

Old Corpse Road are a black metal band from the north-east of England, but a different town to the one from which Wodensthroner emerged. They have been around for a number of years and evolved out of a Goth metal band called Nemhain. They have one demo album (*The Echoes of Tales Once Told*, released 2009) and one split album (*The Bones of this Land are not Speechless* with English black metal band The Meads of Asphodel, released 2010) to their credit, but have yet to sign to a big independent such as Winterfylleth or Wodensthroner.

Old Corpse Road take their name from the band members' love of walking in the hills of the north of England and their love of English folklore and heritage³: corpse roads are common in these isolated areas, routes from a village in one dale to a church in another that were used to take bodies to burial grounds (many of these old corpse roads are still accessible on foot). Old Corpse Road are regulars on the extreme metal live circuit, supporting bigger acts in London and the north of England, and playing all-dayers with other local bands. Their songs are based on the folk tales and folklore of England, mainly the folklore of the area around their home town, but also drawing on stories from across the country (their song "The Witch of Wookey Hole" is based on a folk tale set in Somerset). Unlike Winterfylleth and Wodensthroner, Old Corpse Road have no controversies attached to them: there are no accusations/stories of NSBM association or fascism/racism.

Oakenshield

Oakenshield is a one-man Folk/Heathen Metal Band from Yorkshire, formed in 2004. The name of the band evokes Viking/Saxon warriors but comes from JRR Tolkien's Middle-earth, where it is the name of the King of the exiled dwarves in *The Hobbit*, Thorin Oakenshield. Oakenshield's first and only album so far, *Gylfaginning* (2008), was released on a small German independent extreme metal label. The album draws explicitly on Viking mythology, with songs about the life tree

Yggdrasil, Valhalla and various incidents drawn from the Edda myth cycles. Oakenshield's next album will focus on tales of Viking Yorkshire, and after that there is a plan for cycle of songs focusing on the 1461 Battle of Towton (Yorkshire) in the Wars of the Roses (Lucas, Deeks and Spracklen). Oakenshield has been established by a musician who plays with a range of other extreme metal bands in Leeds and the north of England. Because it is a one-man studio project there have been no live gigs. Oakenshield has received some attention in the metal press, where the band's sole member stressed the importance of understanding history. On-line, Oakenshield links to the Campaign for Real Ale: this denotes both Viking-like capacity for alcohol and the need to preserve old traditions. Like Old Corpse Road, no controversies have attached themselves to Oakenshield: there have been no accusations/stories of association with NSBM or fascism/racism.

Analysis and Discussion

Invoking heritage and the past

For all of the respondents in the bands, their songs and music were built from their keen historical sense. All of the respondents believed strongly in the importance of knowing history, of knowing stories about the past. Heritage and place were bound together in the construction of local, northern histories, narratives that owed as much to mythology as they did to traditions. These local narratives were part of the

symbolic boundaries of the imaginary community in which the bands belonged: partly imagined (Anderson), historicized through myth, and partly expressed in the symbols and semiotic discourse of the black metal scene. For Oakenshield, the desire to tell others about what he had learned from his own analysis of history was important:

I've always had a keen interest in history from a very early age, I guess there's something about the romanticism of it that attracted me as a youngster, and as I grew older and my knowledge developed, I began to understand the real importance of history and the less romantic side of it. What we can learn about who we are today from history is incredible and should never be overlooked by anyone (Oakenshield).

Others believed that their interpretation of history was a correct version of the English past, which has been lost in modern society because of the incoherent teaching of history and the lack of interest in the "true" aspects of Englishness and English identity found in the old stories of England. This of course is not something unique to black metal or the north of England - nationalists, democrats, fascists, communists and liberals have all invoked the narratives of the past, the particular heritage of exclusive place, to make political capital in the present (Anderson; Hobsbawm and Ranger; Smith). But for the metal bands in our study, their status as minor idols in a small scene gave them a strong platform to

influence the consumers in that scene. Winterfylleth's Chris Naughton was interested in teaching listeners something about English history he feared had been lost in the public at large:

I think to that end we want[ed] to make music that draws relevance to the knowledge of history and folklore we think is dwindling within the populous of our nation. The aim being to insight a bit more passion and conviction in people to care about themselves and their nation before they become slaves to Europe without having any say so. We feel to that end that the music we have made and the things we have written about has served to provoke people into political debate and challenge people's perceptions or opinions about what things like nation, politics, culture or heritage mean to them (Naughton).

Two of the band members in particular mentioned the importance of the past of the place of the north of England, and its association with a particular set of myths. Kohl has argued that stereotypes of Northernness are embedded in writing about its landscape. From Daniel Defoe navigating his way down Blackstone Edge, to Victorian social commentators on the evils of industrialization, writers from the South of England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries entrenched stereotypes of the northern English Other: a Northernness of bleak hills, dark clouds and unruly natives. As Navickas shows, these stereotypes had some basis in the reality of the

contrast between the unrestful northern working towns, and the soot-blackened moors rising above them. These stereotypes, says Kohl, became taken-for-granted *facts* about Yorkshire and Lancashire, the industrial counties of the North, in the twentieth century. For the Old Corpse Road respondent, such mythologies were important but not all-defining, and they could see alternative sources of inspiration:

I think there is a natural affinity with Northern History and therefore I could say it's very important. But if I am honest the atmosphere and essence is possibly just as important aspect therefore a tale from Irish history can be just as inspiring to me as one from my home town (The Dreamer).

For Wodensthroner's Hréowsian the northern past was a combination of the deep roots of the Old English world his band writes about, but also the more recent post-industrial north harrowed by the loss of the factories in the last quarter of the twentieth century:

The North East is an inspiring and abhorrent area in equal measures with stunning coastal scenery, rich Anglo-Saxon history and a distinct regional culture juxtaposed against post-industrial urban decay, widespread unemployment and a closed-minded herd mentality (Hréowsian in Wodensthroner).

All the bands expressed an interest in using their music to inform their listeners about alternative narratives about the past, about their heritage, and about the place of heavy metal in popular culture. This took the form of constructing alternative mythologies (Anderson; Cohen). For Oakenshield, the imperative was to prove the importance of the old Saxon and Viking past in the uniqueness of Yorkshireness:

In Yorkshire and the north east we have a dialect and accent derived largely from Scandinavian and Germanic tongues. It would be naive and quite childish to assume that this means we are related to these ancient peoples by blood, but it remains an integral part of our local history. The Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians have played as important a part in our northern identity as the Celtic tribes that originally inhabited the lands. I have read a few books on Dark Age Europe and the mythologies of the Celts, Scandinavians and Anglo-Saxons. I took the *Gylfaginning* album concept from the Prose and Poetic Eddas (Oakenshield).

Winterfylleth's Naughton's main concern was with England and Englishness, and the need to construct a mythology about England's past that associated the modern-day "English" with their roots. For Naughton, the geographically located folk identity is associated with some neo-pagan notion of a right for the right land, an awareness of the binding nature of traditional community and some *genius loci* (Latin: spirit of

the place). Such uses of history are celebrated around the world, in many different cultures and countries: preserving the past through history and archaeology, celebrating the past through the promotion of heritage; linking the present to the past through local histories and an awareness of the deep roots of traditions, families and localities (Cohen; Smith, "Uses"). This is not just subaltern history: such banal nationalisms exist in most developed countries (Anderson): people need to be able to identify with a particular place, especially at times of globalizing change (Bauman; Bramham; Spracklen, "The Meaning"). However, Naughton believes his band is unfairly accused of transcending the line between patriotic "folksiness" and racism:

We hold a strong view that there has been a concerted effort within the UK to discourage or indoctrinate English/British people into thinking they are not allowed to celebrate who they are or where they come from and to do so is "taboo," "racist," "fascist," or is to be vilified. We feel that there is a spiritual-emotional force that a sense of place and identity has in a people (Naughton).

In an echo of this local heritage and local mythology, Old Corpse Road's *The Dreamer* has a sense of place and heritage that is not specifically English, but more rural in nature, echoing the Romantic movements of nineteenth-century Europe - along with the more modern discourses of

conservatism, conservation and green-ness (Smith, "Uses").

This is accentuated by the mythology of humanity's interaction with the sublime places, and the folk stories that emerge out of that interaction:

We have a great love of the outdoors and visiting places where mankind has interacted with the landscape in a meaningful and interesting way, it is here where the great folktales come to life (The Dreamer).

Wodensthroner's Árfæst hopes for a new heathen folk mentality. However, he is sceptical of the ability of heavy metal's fans to engage with heathenism and folk histories beyond the superficial (fake) swords and (real) ale-horns that dominate the modern metal festivals. What he wants is a heteronormative masculinity (Butler) that eschews the commercial symbolism of swords and drinking-horns for a deeper, mythological hero persona. He does think that such folk metal is better than the corporate metal of the commodified mainstream, but he wonders whether folk metal is merely gratification and sublimation:

As for the recent surge in popularity, I think the whole beer-swilling festival stuff like Korpiklaani and Turisas provided an ideal alternative for many people to the tiresome self-important angst of mainstream emo and metalcore, being lively, triumphant, ebullient even at its most aggressive and giving people the opportunity to get the dressing up box out. I would like to talk about a

growing spiritual return to heathen values and beliefs, and maybe that's true for a lot of people, but to be honest I think most people just want to get pissed and wave plastic swords about and forget for a time that they work in Dixons or what have you (Árfæst in Wodensthron).

The Heritage of Metal

The music these bands play is heavy metal, and the band members we interviewed all listed a wide range of metal bands as formative influences. As musicians they have an understanding of the musical heritage of the genre, its roots and fashions, its themes and its own invented traditions about Satan and individualism (Kahn-Harris). They also understand the heritage of extreme metal, black metal's unique ideologies and black metal's position in the wider extreme metal scene: the symbols and semiotic discourses and edgework that mark the boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Cohen). For Winterfylleth's Naughton, the band's music is an extension of the oppositionality of extreme metal, its anger at the mainstream, and an extension of the genre's (self) educational message about truth:

Also, extreme metal/punk/grind/noise etc, when done well, has always served to transcend just the music and challenge people for the good and we would hope to continue that sense of challenging the status quo in what we do (Naughton).

Black metal draws equally on nationalism and a celebration of folkish pasts as it does on Satan and misanthropy (Spracklen, "A Blaze"). Old Corpse Road positions his band's concern with folklore within the accepted ideologies in the black metal scene. Even though strictly speaking the racist folk histories of the black metal scene (typified by Hate Forest - see Spracklen, "A Blaze") are completely different to the Victorian folk tales about ghosts and murders drawn on by Old Corpse Road - in black metal, bands and musicians need to demonstrate scene knowledge and need to prove they are not outsiders ("scenesters" or hipsters) pushing black metal's boundaries too far (and not taking the ideology seriously):

There are many topics that can be tackled by black metal musicians (from Satanism to fairies, from nature to nuclear war) but we were drawn to the things we value the most namely nature and the folklore mankind has attached to it (The Dreamer).

The sound of black metal, the sonic heritage associated with the Norwegian bands of the 1990s (Mayhem and Darkthrone in particular, which in turn were influenced by the first wave of black metal in the 1980s, along with punk and death metal), is an important motivation for Wodensthroner's Hréowsian. The "evil" nature⁴ of the scales, the riffs, the singing and the blastbeats, makes black metal something truly sublime, something of the night (Spracklen, "A Blaze"), something that

underwrites the nightmares about modernity, but which can equally give hope in that which is anti-modern, or anti-human.

Metal, and more specifically "Black metal" is the perfect vehicle for our concept as it allows us to produce dynamic, emotionally charged music that connects with the carnal nature of mankind. There is something innately primal about the thundering drums and raging guitar melodies of black metal which seems perfectly suited to our "message" (Hréowsian in Wodensthron).

Their Music

All the musicians believed in their creative agency (see also Kahn-Harris); they believed what they were doing was creating art, black metal music which would resonate with the wider scene, speak to the listener on some psychic level, and give them as creators a communicative sense of satisfaction (see Spracklen, "The Meaning"). They believed that their music had a transcendent quality, which set it apart from the mainstream. These musicians are careful to follow the elitist line of black metal, which argues that other parts of the metal scene have sold out, become a part of the corporate, globalizing culture of the mainstream, and only black metal stands true, pure and kult against the pop music of the masses (Spracklen, "A Blaze"). Wodensthron's Árfæst expressed this very clearly when describing their music and the wider black metal scene:

It presents Northern European culture, but aside from the inevitable anti-Christian rhetoric it does not argue that North European culture is innately superior to other cultures. More than ever I think Anti-Christian sentiments go hand in hand with Anti-Globalization and Anti-capitalism, a call to preserve and celebrate different cultural identities, not to place one above another. I think there's an important distinction to be made between celebrating one's culture and jingoistic trumpeting (Árfæst in Wodensthron).

Each of the musicians had a favorite creative moment, a favorite song, which exemplified their commitment to the black metal ideology and ethos: against the modern world; for the struggle of the individual against the herd; and for the imagined, imaginary, symbolic landscape of northern Europe (in this case, England and its north). To end this part of the paper, we leave Oakenshield to explain about his inspirations for a song that has yet to be released to the metal-buying public:

On the forthcoming album there is a song based loosely on Bernard Cornwell's account of the elusive battle of Cynuit Hill. I have adapted the lyrics to speak from the perspective of someone involved who is questioning the idea of fate. They use the land surrounding the character as a metaphor for his destiny, and he must face the battle and walk the path that is chosen for him. For me,

this is the song I am most proud of because it is easy to adapt lyrics straight from a book or story, whereas here I have taken a concept and related it not just to ancient beliefs, but to beliefs that some people still hold today (Oakenshield).

Conclusions

Smith ("Heritage, Gender") argues that heritage is often masculine, promotes (elite-Anglo-) masculine gender roles, and tells a male-centered story, whilst Littler suggests that within British public spaces the dominant mode of heritage enshrines masculine prowess and heroism. The monolithic and fixed nature of identity is assumed within heritage, which means that identity categories are rarely questioned and hence are reproduced in dominant accounts of heritage. One must consider how dominant or subversive class, ethnicity, gender and other collective identifications are legitimized, naturalized or forgotten within the heritage narratives presented in the music of northern English extreme metal. Whilst Samuel suggests that heritage could be considered a strategy that bids for hegemony, "a way of using knowledge in the service of power" (Samuel 243), Smith recognizes the performative aspect of engagement with heritage, alongside conceptualizing heritage as a discourse, a form of social practice that organizes our understandings of concepts like heritage, the social and technical practices we act out, as

well as the construction and reproduction of knowledge (Smith, "Uses" 3-4). She acknowledges that there are two levels to heritage, the first being the "authorized heritage discourse" which promotes a "consensus version of history by state-sanctioned cultural institutions and elites," the alternative being heritage as a resource to "challenge and refine received values and identities by a range of subaltern groups" (Smith, "Uses" 4). In examining the discourses produced within the northern English extreme metal scene, one must consider where it fits within this dichotomy, to what extent it challenges or affirms the authorized heritage discourse, whilst also recognizing that the construction of these narratives are implicated in the power relations involved in interpreting and selectively forgetting the past, attributing value and meaning, as well as (re)producing social frameworks.

All the band members in the research were aware of their communicative freedom in extreme metal to write about whatever motivated them. All invoked stories of heritage and the past, and linked belonging in the extreme metal community with an acceptance of a masculinized, heroicized, warrior past. Northernness and Englishness are key themes of the mythologizing. In essence, a number of imaginary communities intersect the black metal scene in which these musicians make their music, each with their own boundaries, symbols, discourses, traditions, imagined histories, myths and edgework. Englishness and northernness are part of a wider

Northern European imagined community within black metal; black metal is part of extreme metal; and the musicians also find their imaginary communities intersecting with other imaginary communities of nation, race, class and masculinity. Heritage plays an active role in all these communities, at all levels of belonging, in all their musical expressions of history, myth and metalness. Wodensthroner and Winterfylleth write songs about Saxon English warriors fighting their enemies, replicating familiar tropes of heteronormativity (heroic men fighting and killing and dying for their land – see Butler and Gilmore), constructing the English warrior man as the best man because he is a noble warrior fighting for his people against the evil invaders; Oakenshield finds inspiration in the Viking kingdom of York to reflect on his own identity as a Yorkshireman; and Old Corpse Road associate their social identity and imagined community with the hills of the north and the fairy stories of the pre-industrial past.

There is then a clear sense of being anti-modern – returning to idealized, rural pasts or finding a pure sense of nationalist identity against the evils of the (post)modern world. This is a common theme in black metal, where the far-right conservative concerns about the hybrid world meet the left's suspicion of capitalism and commodification. This return to the past was not just a nostalgic desire for a golden age. As Cohen argues, heritage and history narratives are used to make sense of the present and re-shape the present

using the symbols and forms of the past. So our bands move beyond nostalgia for some Neverland of English moors and dales and attempt to fuse something highly modern - the artificial, digitized, industrialized, electronically constructed soundscapes of metal music - with, paradoxically, messages about the corrupting nature of modernity.

These Northern English extreme "metallars" express a desire to tell histories that have been forgotten in a globalizing world - heritage narratives associated with the North. However, their use of heritage and myth is still bounded by the invented traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger) and symbolic boundaries of the wider extreme metal scene: the mythology of Germanic warriors and regional and national pride.

This research shows the importance of leisure in constructing identity, community and belonging. These black metal bands are not politically racist (though they do accept, legitimate and play with the racism associated with the Norwegian, second-wave of black metal), but they are interested in constructing exclusive imaginary communities based around historicized notions of Englishness (and hegemonic constructions of whiteness - see Lucas, Deeks and Spracklen). For Winterfylleth and Wodensthroner, the *frissance* of far-right politics taps into the misanthropy of the black metal scene and serves as a convenient way to sell records to black metal fans used to the excesses and racisms associated

with NSBM (Spracklen, "A Blaze"): being controversial makes sound business sense even if the allegations are unfounded. For the musicians, making this music is part of their leisure lives - they are not full-time music professionals, though Winterfylleth are beginning to earn fees from the lucrative metal festival circuit. The musicians share this way of life, this leisure activity, this leisure community of imaginary communities, with their fans - so they are limited in the ways in which they can transcend the symbolic boundaries and invented traditions of their historicized imaginations. Straying too far from the narratives of heritage, nationalism, elitism and heroic masculinity would have to involve the acceptance of the fans, and while metal fans claim to be open-minded about their music preferences (Kahn-Harris), in truth metal fans (as all pop music fans) tend towards conservative tastes. Balancing originality with familiarity is central in most popular music creative practice and whilst musicians need to gauge the boundaries of that development of a sound/style, the acceptance of this by the audience relies on perception of authenticity and perhaps even the creative capital that artists possess in the eyes of the fans.

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¹ Extreme metal is used to describe black metal, death metal and variants of those genres. All the bands we interviewed situated themselves in extreme metal and in black metal, the form of extreme metal associated with elitism, individualism, nationalism and misanthropy (Spracklen, 2006).

² The Peak District is a National Park in the North of England, in a triangle bounded by Manchester, Sheffield and Derby.

³ Source: unpublished part of an interview with the drummer for the research project published in Lucas et al. (2011).

⁴ Lucas and Kahn-Harris separately describe the way in which black metal draws on the practice and theory of heavy metal composition to exaggerate the 'evil' feeling through dissonance, key changes, particular intervals and fast rhythms.